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Marine Fisheries Advisory

Commercial Black Sea Bass, Summer Flounder and Horseshoe Crab Limits for 2020

On April 1, 2020, the Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission approved DMF recommendations to adjust the commercial fishing limits for black sea bass, summer flounder, and horseshoe crab. These changes are being made in response to recent fishery performance and commercial quota adjustments. The following changes will take effect on May 1 and are described in more detail below.

Black Sea Bass

Massachusetts' 2020 commercial black sea bass quota is 725,400 pounds (59% increase compared to 2019). To improve access to this quota, directed fishery limits are being increased. The commercial hook and line and pot fisheries will continue to open on July 9 with open fishing days of Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays. However, trip limits are being increased by about 30%, with the trip limit for pot fishermen increasing from 300 pounds to 400 pounds and the trip limit for anglers increasing from 150 pounds to 200 pounds.

The weir fishery is not subject to a commercial season, fishing days, or trip limits, but is instead afforded a seasonal set-aside. The set-aside is being increased from 15,000 pounds to 24,000 pounds. Any quantity of this set-aside that is unused when the weirs are removed from the water (typically during the late spring or early summer) is rolled back into the commercial quota available to the directed fishery.

Additionally, the incidental catch limits for trawlers have been adjusted to enhance the retention of marketable fish and reduce regulatory discarding. During the springtime small mesh trawl squid fishery (April 23–June 9) permitted trawlers may now retain and land 100 pounds of black sea bass seven days per week; the daily trip limit was previously 50 pounds. Aggregate black sea bass landings by this trawl fishery remain capped at 50,000 pounds. Then during the summertime large mesh mixed trawl fishery (June 10–October 31), trawlers may now retain and land up to 100 pounds of black sea bass during the open fishing days in the commercial summer flounder fishery (Sundays–Thursdays). Previously, trawlers participating in this fishery were allowed to retain up to 150 pounds of black sea bass, but only on open black sea bass days (Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays) during the summertime directed black sea bass fishery (July 9–Quota).

Summer Flounder

Massachusetts' 2020 commercial summer flounder quota is 786,399 pounds. This is similar to the 2019 quota of 741,523 pounds, of which only 74% was taken. To improve access to this quota, directed fishery limits for the Period II fishery (April 23–December 31) are being increased.

For the inshore summertime fishery (June 10–October 31), the commercial trawl trip limit is being increased from 300 pounds to 400 pounds and the commercial hook and line trip limit is being increased from 200 pounds to 250 pounds. No changes are being made to the existing open fishing day schedule (Sundays–Thursdays). Additionally, DMF intends to renew its pilot program allowing trawlers to retain and land two consecutive daily limits of summer flounder provided catch from the first day is segregated and sealed for the second days catch. Information regarding enrollment in this pilot program will be available in early May.

Then during the offshore fall fishery (November 1–December 31), the closed fishing days of Fridays and Saturdays will be eliminated, allowing the possession and landing of summer flounder seven days per week provided quota remains available. Additionally, the trip limit is being adjusted to allow vessels to possess and land 1,000 pounds of summer flounder if 5% or more of the quota remains available on November 1; if less than 5% of the annual quota remains available, the trip limit will be 500 pounds.

Horseshoe Crab Limits

Massachusetts' 2020 horseshoe crab quota will remain at 165,000 crabs. In 2019, this quota was taken on September 1. This quota closure forced trawlers fishing in the summertime large mesh mixed trawl fishery to discard any horseshoe crabs incidentally caught during September and October. To improve the management of this quota, DMF will no longer issue the Letter of Authorization to trawlers without a limited entry horseshoe crab bait permit endorsement allowing them to retain up to 300 crabs when fishing for summer flounder. Instead, DMF has established a 75-crab open access trip limit for trawlers fishing for summer flounder.

For more information, please visit our website:

www.mass.gov/marinefisheries